

January 17, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Reid:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of December 11, 2011, forwarding correspondence from your constituent, Mr. John Mitchell, regarding plans for new nuclear power plants in Alabama. Initially, let me clarify Mr. Mitchell's apparent misunderstanding that "Congress outlawed the building of any new nuclear power plants on American soil after the meltdown at 3 Mile Island...." Federal law does not prohibit the building of new nuclear power plants in the U.S., and the NRC has in place a rigorous regulatory program for the review and approval of any such proposed facilities.

Regarding the status of potential new reactors in Alabama, in the early 1970's, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) applied for and received construction permits for Units 1 and 2 at the Bellefonte site near Scottsboro, Alabama, but construction of those units was halted in the late 1980's. In August 2011, the TVA board voted unanimously to complete construction of the Unit 1 reactor. To date, construction has not yet restarted on Unit 1, and the NRC is awaiting receipt of a letter from TVA notifying the agency of the expected date for resuming construction and providing additional technical information that the staff will evaluate. In order to begin operating Unit 1, the NRC must first grant TVA an operating license.

In October 2007, TVA submitted an application to build and operate two new reactors (Units 3 and 4) at the Bellefonte site. In September 2010, TVA requested that the NRC defer its review efforts on the application for Units 3 and 4. In December 2011, TVA reaffirmed its request that the NRC defer all review activities indefinitely.

Please be assured that the NRC is following its established regulatory program for review and approval of any new nuclear reactors that might be built at the Bellefonte site to ensure protection of public health and safety during both construction and operation. If you need any additional information, please contact me or Rebecca Schmidt, Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, at (301) 415-1776.

Sincerely,

/RA by Martin J. Virgilio for/

R. W. Borchardt
Executive Director
for Operations

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